

Barnardos Training and Resource Service

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CHILDREN FIRST

NATIONAL GUIDANCE FOR THE PROTECTION AND WELFARE OF CHILDREN 2011

Barnardos has prepared this briefing note for the early childhood care and education sector to highlight the key changes that are contained in Children First 2011 as relevant to the early years sector.

This document is not a comprehensive guide to Children First 2011 but rather highlights the main changes relevant to the early years sector contained in Children First 2011, as compared to the document published in 1999.

Overall, Children First 2011 is much clearer and more concise than the previous guidelines.

Legislation

In the Foreword, Minister Fitzgerald states: “We intend to enact legislation so that all people who are working with children will have a statutory duty to comply with the Children First: National Guidance.”

Note as of now Children First is not yet on a statutory basis, pending the publication and enactment of new legislation.

The need for all those working with children to be vetted, the role of the Garda Vetting Unit and the intention to put this on a statutory basis is also included.

Note the Minister for Justice Alan Shatter TD published the National Vetting Bureau Bill 2011 on July 27th 2011.

Definitions of Child Abuse

The list of what constitutes **physical abuse** of a child has been expanded to include slapping, observing violence and “allowing or creating a substantial risk of significant harm to a child.”

There is express reference to and acknowledgement of the harm caused to children by exposure to domestic violence, which is included in the definition of **emotional abuse**. Exposure to inappropriate or abusive material through new technology is also included for the first time.

There have been two additions to **the signs and symptoms of neglect** as follows:

- inattention to basic hygiene and
- failure to provide adequate care for the child’s developmental problems

Responsibilities of Organisations

Consistent with the principles of Children First, every organisation, both public and private, that is providing services for children or that is in regular direct contact with children should:

- (i) ensure best practice in the recruitment of staff or volunteers, which includes Garda vetting, taking up of references, good HR practices in interviewing, induction training, probation and ongoing supervision and management;
- (ii) ensure that staff members or volunteers are aware of how to recognise signs of child abuse or neglect.

Chapter 5 covers the procedures for assessment and management of child protection and welfare concerns and has a much clearer structure of guidance for HSE professionals.

Chapter 10 covers training and there is a new section recommending interagency training on child protection and welfare.

Useful Resources

Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2011) Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare for Children is available to download from

<http://www.dcy.a.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?DocID=1589>

Note hard copies are currently unavailable from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. They will become available in September 2011.

Barnardos (2011) Protecting Children: A Child Protection Guide for Early Years and School Age Childcare Services is based on Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare for Children.